

April 5, 2010

**Presentation to North Carolina General Assembly
Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee
April 6, 2010 at 1 PM in Room 544 of
Legislative Office Building, Raleigh, NC**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am Leigh Woodall, Chairman of the Joint City / County Thoroughfare Advisory Committee in Roxboro and Person County. I reside at 200 Reade Dr. in Roxboro. Thank you for the opportunity to present our “case study” as to how North Carolina’s method for distributing transportation funds has impacted our county during the last quarter of a century. The bottom line is that because of the “equity formula,” not a single dollar has been spent in Person County for a STIP highway construction project since 1987.

Three years ago, the local newspaper headline screamed, **“What’s Equitable About Zero Dollars In Twenty Years?”** When it comes to the “Equity Formula,” we think it instructive for the honorable members of the Joint Legislative Transportation Oversight Committee to understand the consequences of how NCDOT has interpreted GS 136-17.2A as it applies to our 38,000 population county in the northern piedmont, bordering Virginia and due north of Durham. Roxboro is the only incorporated municipality in Person County.

You see, the “Equity Formula” has been used as a convenient excuse by NCDOT as a reason why their construction schedule for Roxboro and Person County’s number one highway project had to be thrown out the window and shifted into the future. The project to which I refer is R-2241, the four-laning of US Hwy 501 from Roxboro to the Virginia border. This is a 10.7 mile project in Person County designed to connect to an already existing four-laned Hwy 501 north of the State line. For the purpose of this presentation, I shall refer to the R-2241 project as the Hwy 501 project. Both Roxboro and Person County local governments have been unified on the Hwy 501 project since the beginning.

In 1993 the Hwy 501 project had a cost estimate of seventeen million dollars. Today, that estimate has escalated to \$83 million. The scope of our project is the same now as it was in 1986. Citizens of Roxboro and Person County have transferred more than \$150 million of disposable income to the State in the form of motor fuels taxes and other fees for highway improvement.

North Carolina is often referred to as a “donor” State when it comes to getting back our fair share of Federal highway dollars. Well, Person County is a big-time donor County to North Carolina, apparently contributing to highway construction projects in all parts of the State – both rural and urban. Is this equitable?

The debate about equity seems to be slanted toward rural counties being the beneficiaries of State-financed road construction at the expense of the more congested and road-needy urban areas. Person County is considered a rural county, but I can assure you, we have not been the recipient of a single dollar of STIP road construction money since 1987.

Part of this paradox relates to Person County being placed in Highway Division 5 along with the urban counties of Durham and Wake. I am not arguing against the need for road construction in urban counties because we recognize the need to mitigate urban congestion issues. On the other hand, however, I would like to emphasize to any State Official who may be concerned about equity – the plight of Roxboro and Person County.

In 2003 the reason given to us for delaying the construction schedule for Hwy 501 was that too much money had been spent in Division 5; therefore, money for the Hwy 501 project had to be shifted to build the Fayetteville outer loop. Similarly, in 2007 money was shifted to New Hanover County for constructing its by-pass of Wilmington. In both of these examples, the reason the equity formula was out of whack was due to urban counties in Division 5 receiving money for **their** projects, not because rural Person County was the culprit. As our former NCDOT Board Member, Mr. Kenneth Spaulding, frequently reminded us – it was mainly because of Wake County.

I have heard it argued that highway divisions must be realigned with rural counties being together in a given division and likewise for urban counties. I would argue that whatever solution is arrived at, Roxboro and Person County should be entitled to a reasonable return on money which their citizens contribute to the motor fuels tax pool for highway construction.

Whatever course of action the General Assembly proposes for addressing the equity issue, I would like to be given the opportunity to evaluate such a proposal with regard to its impact on Person County, before final action is taken. After all, it will be a sad commentary on North Carolina for my future counterpart on the Roxboro / Person Thoroughfare Committee to address you or the NCDOT Board with the question, **“What’s equitable about zero dollars for a quarter-of-a-century?”**

Thanks for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

Leigh C. Woodall, Jr.